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Learning cities on the move

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The modern Learning City concept emerged from the work of OECD on lifelong learning with streams of Learning Cities and Educating Cities having much in common but having little contact with each other. While the early development of Learning Cities in the West has not been sustained, the present situation is marked by the dynamic development of Learning Cities in East Asia – especially in China, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan. In this context, the paper discusses the evolution of three generations of Learning Cities since 1992 and speculates on the future. The experience of the first generation is discussed in terms of development in the UK, Germany, Canada, and Australia where initiatives, with some exceptions, have not been sustained. Beijing and Shanghai are discussed as examples of the innovative second generation in East Asia, which is seen as a community relations model in response to the socio-economic transformation of these countries. International interest in Learning Cities has now been enhanced following a major UNESCO International Conference on Learning Cities in Beijing in October 2013, which is to be followed by a Second International Conference in Mexico City. The Beijing Conference adopted the Beijing Declaration on Learning Cities supported by a Key Features document. The paper speculates on possible future development post Mexico City, including the situation in Australia,

which is seen as opening opportunities for innovative initiatives.

Keywords: *Learning Cities, Educating Cities, Beijing Declaration on Learning Cities, Key Features of Learning Cities, learning communities*

One of the most significant recent developments in the search for innovative ways to provide lifelong learning opportunities for all has been the growing international interest in the concept of Learning Cities. This interest has been reflected in the First International Conference on Learning Cities held in Beijing in October 2013 sponsored jointly by UNESCO, the Chinese Government, and the city of Beijing. The PASCAL International Observatory has supported Learning City development since 2011 through its PIE and Networks programs. A Second UNESCO International Conference is to be held in Mexico City. While the Learning City approach has been growing rapidly in East Asia – especially in China, Republic of Korea, and Taiwan – the situation in the west is more complex with an early flourishing in countries such as the UK, Germany, and Canada followed by an apparent decline.

With leadership now coming from the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in Hamburg, and cities and governments in East Asia, it is timely to consider the future of the Learning City concept, including whether the present activity should be seen as a step towards the vision of a universal learning society articulated by the UNESCO Faure Commission report in 1972. In this context, this paper provides an overview of the development of the Learning City concept through two phases of development in the West and East Asia, and speculates on a possible third phase following the impact of the international conferences in Beijing and Mexico City and the work of PASCAL.

Origins of the concept

While the Learning City idea can be traced back through history (Longworth & Osborne, 2010), the modern concept of a Learning City emerged from the work of OECD on lifelong learning, and then developed in two streams of Learning Cities and Educating Cities with little contact with each other.

OECD work on lifelong learning led to a report titled *City strategies*

for lifelong learning prepared for the Second Congress of Educating Cities held in Gothenburg in November 1992 (OECD, 1992). This report contained portraits of seven cities, including Adelaide, that had taken initiatives to progress lifelong learning opportunities for their citizens.

Educating Cities

The Educating City idea was the first to develop an international organisation with agreed objectives and procedures with the establishment of the International Association of Educating Cities in 1994 with a base in Barcelona, followed by the adoption of the Charter of Educating Cities in 2004 (Messina & Valdes-Cotera, 2013). The article by Messina & Valdes-Cotera in the special 2013 Learning City edition of the *International Review of Education* provides a useful overview of the features of Educating Cities, and their development in Latin America.

While the Messina & Valdes-Cotera article shows that Educating Cities and Learning Cities share much in common in terms of their broad educational and social objectives, there are significant cultural, organisational, and political differences that reflect the geographic location of each stream. The International Association of Educating Cities in 2014 had 478 city members in 37 countries. However, 430 of these were in "Latin" countries — Spain (168), France (128), Portugal (54), Italy (22) and South America (59) (IAEC, 2014). The role of local government councils is central to the work of Educating Cities so that it is not surprising that Educating Cities have taken a close interest in the work of schools reflecting the situation in member countries where local authorities have school responsibilities. A further feature evident in the 2004 Charter is the link to fundamental principles, such as the right to education, set out in United Nations instruments (Messina & Valdes-Cotera, 2013: 428).

Gen 1 Learning Cities

While the history of Educating Cities is well documented with an international organisation and agreed Charter to set directions, the story of the first generation of Learning cities in the West is more one of individual initiatives, considerable diversity in approach, and a pattern of rise and fall that holds the seeds for re-growth in new more broadly based Learning Cities which I call Gen 3 Learning Cities.

I comment below on developments in the UK, Germany, Canada, and Australia to illustrate some of the characteristics of this initial generation of Learning Cities in the West. It was a period where, unlike the situation of Educating Cities, there was before the UNESCO Beijing Conference in October 2013 no broadly agreed charter and set of key features for Learning Cities so that development depended in most cases on individual initiatives with an uncertain guarantee of funding over a sustained period.

Nevertheless, a feature of this initial period was the start of the development of a research base, much of it funded by the European Commission, which is now accessible through a number of data bases resulting from EC projects (Longworth & Osborne, 2010).

Several books by Longworth were influential in articulating the features of learning communities and cities in this initial phases of Learning City development. In 1999 he defined a learning community/city in the following terms.

> *A learning community is a city, town or region, which mobilises all its resources in every sector to develop and enrich all its human potential for the fostering of personal growth, the maintenance of social cohesion, and the creation of prosperity.* (Longworth, 1999)

This 1999 statement by Longworth shows how the Learning City concept had evolved from the 1992 OECD focus on lifelong learning to a more complex entwining of individual and community development objectives linked to the creation of prosperity.

Longworth's statement is also interesting in its application to cities, towns, regions, and communities, which are all seen as "learning communities". This recognised that in some countries, such as Australia, these initiatives had usually occurred in rural and regional towns and cities and in suburban components of large cities such as Hume and Melton in Melbourne and Marion in Adelaide.

The story of Learning Cities in the UK, Germany, Canada, and Australia may be taken as illustrating typical features of the impact and outcomes of the initial phase of Learning City development.

An analysis of the UK experience with Learning Cities was undertaken by Hamilton and Jordan in 2010. This may be seen as the rise and fall of Learning Cities in the UK (Hamilton & Jordan, 2011). Around 1999 the UK Learning Cities Network had 50 members with significant cities such as Glasgow, Manchester, Liverpool, Carlisle, and Dundee as declared Learning Cities (Hamilton & Jordan, 2011: 195-197). However, by 2010 the UK Learning Cities Network had ceased to exist. Hamilton and Jordan comment cautiously in the following terms:

> *The high tide of the learning city in the UK may on the surface appear to have passed. However, new models are emerging under the banner of lifelong learning*. (Hamilton & Jordan, 2011: 205)

The caution of Hamilton and Jordan appears justified as new approaches to lifelong learning are appearing in the UK, some data driven, which could see a revival of Learning City ideas in the UK, perhaps in different forms.

The impact of the Learning City/Region concept in Germany tells a somewhat different story with a stronger government role rather than development depending on initiatives by individual cities. Government support took the form of the Learning Regions Promotion of Networks Program, which was funded from 2001 until 2008 with support from the European Union's Social Fund (Reghenzani & Kearns, 2012) After 2008, this program was followed by the Learning on Place program.

By supporting Learning Regions rather than just cities, the German program introduced flexibility and fairly considerable diversity into these shared experiences. The program was the subject of a careful evaluation undertaken throughout its duration by a team from the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich. However, the 2009 full report of this evaluation study is available in German only.

The history of Learning Cities in Canada and Australia adds to the diversity of experience in this initial phase of Learning City development in the West, with the Canadian situation having much in common with the UK while Australia took a different path.

Lifelong learning in Canada received a considerable boost from a government decision, following consultations across Canada in 2002,

to fund a Canadian Council on Learning to promote lifelong learning across Canada. The Council was funded until 2010 when government funding ceased and the Council ceased operation. During its short life the Council sponsored considerable innovation, such as its Composite Learning Index which was applied to communities across Canada annually up to 2010 to measure progress in creating Canada as a country of learning communities (Cappon & Laughlin, 2013). During this heyday of lifelong learning in Canada, Learning Cities were established in Vancouver and Victoria. An overview paper on the Learning City policies in Vancouver is available in the PASCAL PIE stimulus papers, which are discussed below (http://pie.pascalobservatory.org). Like the UK situation, by 2013 both the Vancouver and Victoria initiatives had discontinued largely because of a lack of funding.

The history of learning communities in Australia turns on individual initiatives with limited support from governments. Most initiatives that have been sustained have been in suburban components of the metropolitan cities such as Hume, Melton, and Marion, or in rural and regional areas such as Gwydir In New South Wales and Townsville so that the term learning community is more common in Australia than learning city. The Australian Learning Community Network has done much with limited resources to sustain the initiatives that exist (http://lcc.edu.au). There is a limited literature on the history of learning communities in Australia. An unpublished 2011 paper by Kearns , commissioned for a Taipei International Conference on Learning Cities, comments on Australian Learning City policy and development up to 2010 (Kearns, 2011).

PIE as a transition initiative

The Pascal International Exchanges (PIE) was implemented by the PASCAL International Observatory to promote online exchanges of information and experience between cities around the world. Overview stimulus papers were prepared for 22 cities around the world, including Beijing and Shanghai, which are discussed below. All PIE stimulus papers may be read on the PIE web site (http://pie.pascalobservatory.org).

While PIE in its origins in 2010 and 2011 reflected the ideas on Learning Cities we have termed Gen 1, the subsequent impact of East

Asian Learning Cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei) influenced PASCAL ideas about Learning Cities and initiated a journey towards what I have termed Gen 3 Learning Cities reflected, in particular, by PASCAL work on building more holistic and integrated policies for sustainable Learning Cities that we have termed EcCoWell (see the EcCoWell clarifying paper in the PIE papers, http://pie.pascalobservatory.org/pascalnow/blogentry). There is a paper on the PIE experience during 2011 to 2013 by the author of this article in the March 2015 issue of the *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* (Vol 20 No 2).

Gen 2 in East Asia

A second generation of Learning Cities developed in East Asia – particularly in China, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan – with characteristics significantly different to cities in the initial generation of development in the West. And also usually in much larger cities. While there is considerable strength in the East Asian model, whether this approach is exportable to countries outside the region is doubtful.

This generation of Learning Cities has demonstrated that the Learning City approach can be successfully implemented and sustained in cities as large as Shanghai, with forms of partnership and governance not found in the West up to now, with a strong research base, with a supportive cultural heritage, and with social objectives linked to the rapid socio-economic transformation of these countries.

A significant feature of the model found in China and Taipei is that development occurs at three levels: the local neighbourhood, the administrative district, and the city overall. Chinese cities such as Shanghai and Beijing are usually divided into 16 to 18 administrative districts so that the district serves as a connector between the neighbourhood and the city. It is of interest that this tripartite division in a city corresponds to the ideas of the American urbanist Jane Jacobs who asserted that cities required three kinds of neighbourhoods which supplemented each other in a complex manner: the city as a whole, street neighbourhoods, and districts of large sub-city size (Jacobs, 1992: 117-132). Chinese Learning Cities correspond to this model which perhaps is a necessary condition in large cities, and which was missing from Gen 1 Learning Cities in the West.

Overviews of the development of the Beijing and Shanghai Learning Cities are available on the PASCAL PIE web site, and may be taken as typical exemplars of Gen 2 Learning Cities in East Asia (Yuan 2012; Huang 2013).

The Beijing Learning City developed in several stages from 2000 when proposals for building learning enterprises were formulated by a group of five government departments which in 2007 became proposals for "the construction of the learning capital city" (Yuan, 2012: 2).

This initiative developed at the three levels as discussed above with community education networks led by community colleges and adult education centres. By 2012 80 percent of the streets in Beijing had established community education centres or learning learning centres (Yuan, 2012). In most districts and centres, school teachers were asked to go into local neighbourhoods and assist in the development of community education (Yuan, 2012: 3).

The broad nature of the approach adopted in Beijing extended to enterprises with a series of policies to support the development of learning organisations, including incentive awards and evaluation studies and outcomes. There is a strong research contribution to the Beijing Learning City that is focussed on the Beijing Institute for the Learning Society (BILS) located within the Beijing Normal University, which draws upon the resources of universities located in Beijing. In addition to supporting the Beijing Learning City, the Institute aims to "enrich and develop the theory of building a learning society with Chinese characteristics" (BILS 2013: 1). A 2013 research report on a *BILS Survey on adult competencies for lifelong learning in Beijing* illustrates the BILS research effort in supporting the Beijing Learning City.

The rapid economic growth of Shanghai with a growing demand for skilled workers, which was above 5 percent annually, and with the social consequences of this growth requiring attention, led to the Shanghai Learning City initiative. While the original stimulus for this initiative was economic, the Shanghai Learning City initiative has evolved in directions that give more attention to community relations and allied social objectives.

As in Beijing, development has occurred at three levels. Co-ordination of effort is being achieved through the Shanghai Municipal Committee on Building a Learning Society established by the Shanghai Municipal Government in 2006, which works with a number of related bodies including the Shanghai Municipal Committee on Spiritual Civilization, Municipal Commission of Science and Technology and others (Huang, 2013: 3).

Again like Beijing, a strong research effort has been built into development of the Shanghai Learning City. The Shanghai Municipal Institute for Lifelong Education (SMILE) was established jointly by the Shanghai Municipal Education Committee and the East China Normal University as a think tank for Shanghai development as a Learning City. An impressive 254 page report titled Shanghai Development Report of Lifelong Education was prepared for an international conference in 2013 which reviewed the progress of the Shanghai Learning City (SMILE, 2013). This report reflects the evolving phases of Shanghai's development as a Learning City from its initial focus on the economic functions of lifelong education to sustaining "the vigorous and harmonious development of society" (SMILE, 2013: 233).

Huang reflects this evolution in her comment:

> *The achievement of building a learning society should not only reflect in the aspect of the economic miracle, but more importantly also reflect in shaping the city's spirit, improving life quality for all, and gaining overall sound development.* (Huang, 2013: 5)

Similar views were expressed by Han and Makino in a comparative analysis of *Learning Cities in East Asia: Japan, the Republic of Korea, and China* prepared for the special Learning Cities edition of the *International Review of Education.* (Han & Makino 2013: 443-468)

> *We believe that the distinctive feature of the Asian type of learning cities can be characterised as a community relations model which is different to the European individual competence model ..... in the sense that learning is fundamentally an individual process* (Han & Makino, 2013: 445).

It is easy to understand why countries, such as China and Korea, undergoing the dislocation of rapid socio-economic transformation

should come to focus on social aspects of building Learning Cities with community relations directed at building a "harmonious society" to the fore. The distinction made by Han and Makino can be seen as largely, although not entirely, defining the distinction between what I have called Gen 1 and Gen 2 Learning Cities.

The question that arises from this situation is whether ways can be found to transform and revive Learning Cities in the West in sustainable ways, while also extending Learning Cities to areas without coverage and so progressing towards a universal learning society, the vision of the 1972 UNESCO Faure Commission report (UNESCO, 1972). I comment on this question below in the light of developments during 2013 to 2015, which could possibly transform the situation of Learning Cities around the world.

Towards Gen 3 Learning Cities

The Learning City concept has been given a considerable boost by a number of events during the period 2013 to 2015, which in their cumulative impact, suggest that a new era in Learning City development could be emerging, which may perhaps provide a pathway towards a universal learning society.

These events include the First International Conference on Learning Cities in Beijing in October 2013 followed by a Second International Conference in Mexico City. The Beijing Conference led to a Beijing Declaration on Learning Cities supported by a Key Features document. In addition, a number of case studies have been prepared to show the Key Features in particular contexts.

Leadership in these developments has been undertaken by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) located in Hamburg. The PASCAL International Observatory has supported these developments through its PIE program until the end of 2013, followed by the successor Learning Cities 2020 Networks program which explores selected aspects of Learning City development.

To support the Beijing Conference, a special issue of the UNESCO *International Review of Education* was prepared with articles on selected developments around the world (Osborne, Kearns & Yang

2013). While the articles reflect progress in some areas, such as in East Asia and in evaluation strategies, they also show the difficulties and limited progress in places such as Africa (Biao, Eseate & Oonyu, 2013). Inclusion of an article on Educating Cities in Latin America was a particular feature, reminding readers of the two streams of parallel developments existing around the world (Messina & Valdes-Cotera, 2013).

The Beijing Declaration on Learning Cities and the Key Features document may be read on the UIL website (http://uil.unesco.org) , and are contained in the report of the Beijing conference (UIL, 2014: 23-36). The Beijing Declaration provides a broad charter for Learning Cities around the concepts of individual empowerment, building cohesive communities, and achieving sustainability. The Declaration broadens the usual Gen 1 concept of a Learning City with the sustainability aspect of the Declaration reaching out to economic development, cultural prosperity, and the natural environment. This view is supported by a firm statement that " learning communities, learning cities, and learning regions are pillars of sustainable development" (UIL, 2014: 23) The Key Features document elaborates on aspects of the Declaration by suggesting possible measures and sources of data (UIL, 2014: 27).

While the Beijing Declaration recognises that cities differ in their cultural and ethnic composition, heritage, and social structures, a key question will be how the Declaration is implemented in a range of diverse contexts so that diversity adds value to the concepts of the Declaration. The approach to "cultural prosperity" in a range of contexts will be a good test of this aspect. The case studies being prepared for a number of cities, including both Beijing and Cork, may help to clarify the spectrum of questions thrown up by implementation of the Beijing Declaration.

Benefits

The Beijing Declaration cited a number of individual and community benefits of Learning Cities, including social, economic, and cultural benefits (UIL, 2014: 23). Preisinger-Kleine supports this view drawing on experience from projects supported by the European Commission.

A substantial body of literature emphasises the major role of

> *learning cities and regions within knowledge-based societies, appraising them as incubators of creativity and innovation* (Preisinger-Kleine, 2013: 522).

Towards a universal learning society?

The UNESCO Faure Commission report of 1972 advocated the concept of a learning society with the relationship between education and society changing fundamentally.

> *In this light, tomorrow's education must form a co-ordinated totality in which all sectors of society are structurally integrated. It will be universalized and continual. From the point of view of individual people, it will be total and creative, and consequently individualized and self-directed. It will be the bulwark and the driving force in culture, as well as in promoting professional activity. This movement is irresistible and irreversible. It is the cultural revolution of our time* (UNESCO, 1972: 165).

While the subsequent UNESCO Delors Commission of 1996 endorsed this concept (UNESCO, 1996: 24) and it has been taken up in more recent times by Cisco Systems in a White Paper on the Learning Society (Cisco Systems, 2010), the question remains whether this is only a utopian vision divorced from reality.

On the other hand, the world has fundamentally changed since the Faure report of 1972. The impact of globalisation, rampant urbanisation, and the scientific and technological revolutions have created a world of global economic interdependence and, for some, a sense that a new global civilization is emerging to follow "the logic of one world" (Mahbubani, 2013). Whether this is the humanistic civilization long advocated by UNESCO and others, hangs in the balance.

Viewed in the broad sweep of history, the evolution of ideas of Learning Cities and Educating Cities since 1992 can be seen as tentative steps towards the ideal of a universal learning society articulated by the Faure Commission in their report. The Beijing conference documents by charting a broad concept of sustainable Learning Cities provides a platform for further steps in moving forward.

While Gen 1 Learning Cities were European in their orientation and Gen 2 reflected their East Asian environment, the emerging Gen 3 Learning Cities will be fully international in drawing on ideas and experience from anywhere, and in addressing the big global issues confronting cities around the world.

Of course, much remains to be done. This includes extending cover of Learning Cities and Educating Cities to the large parts of the world where they do not exist, including Africa and much of Asia. A particular need exists in extending access in rural areas in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere, including exploring the potential of the Learning Region concept in fostering innovative forms of partnership in rural and regional areas.

And what of Australia?

While a number of learning communities have existed in parts of Australia back to 1999, and the Australian Learning Communities Network has striven since 2000 to promote this concept, the Learning City concept has failed to be taken up by any of the large metropolitan cities of Australia, and Australia was not represented at the Beijing conference. This suggests a lack of awareness by policy makers in state and federal governments, unlike the situation in countries such as China and Korea.

Initiatives that have been sustained have been in suburban areas of state capitals such as Hume, Melton, and Marion, and in rural and regional communities such as Gwydir and Townsville. Whether the international initiatives in Beijing and Mexico City will change this situation remains to be seen. What happens in Australia will be a good test case of whether Learning Cities in the West will now experience a resurgence in the emerging international context discussed in this paper.

In a context marked by financial pressures on governments for restraint, and with the welfare state under challenge in many places, there are good reasons to harness the human and other resources that exist in communities in creative ways that build partnership, a civic culture of community service, and a learning culture that both adds to the quality of life and well-being of residents in cities, and their capacity for learning throughout life for economic, social, and cultural reasons.

In addition, the resurgence of Learning Cities in China, Korea, and Taiwan creates opportunities for Australian cities to develop educational and cultural relations with Asian cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Chongqing, and Taipei that will have long-term benefits in "the Asian century". The time is ripe for creative innovations.

Of course, the East Asian model does not easily translate to Australian cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, which have divided powers and responsibilities between a small city area focussed around the central business district and a fairly large number of councils covering suburban areas where most of the population live. Brisbane is different with Brisbane City Council covering large suburban areas as well as the central business district.

The challenge now for governments is to develop an Australian model that will receive recognition around the world and, importantly in the countries of East Asia, and add to the recognition of Australia as a country that has pioneered much social innovation throughout our history.

This optimistic message was echoed by Osborne, Kearns, and Yang in their introduction to the Learning City special issue of the UNESCO *International Review of Education*.

> *While the barriers and challenges to be met and overcome in progressing learning cities are well articulated in this special issue, the dominant message that emerges is an optimistic one. It points to a strengthened international discourse on learning cities, seen as a catalyst to a revitalised humanism and civic awakening, and as a path towards a universal and humane learning society* (Osborne, Kearns & Yang, 2013: 420).

Learning Cities are indeed on the move.

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